

Rep. Nadler Statement at Field Hearing on National 9/11 Health Care Plan

Monday, 21 January 2008

NEW YORK CITY – Congressman Jerrold Nadler (NY-08), whose district includes the site of the World Trade Center, today attended a House Oversight Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement field hearing in New York City entitled “9/11 Health: Why Did HHS Cancel Contracts to Manage Responder Health Care?”

His prepared opening remarks at the hearing are as follows:

“Thank you, Chairman Towns. I would like to thank you for holding this hearing today, and for inviting me to testify, regarding the federal government’s continued malfeasance in the years after September 11.

“I am outraged to stand here yet again to say that the Bush Administration has turned its back on the heroes of 9/11.

“When the World Trade Center collapsed on September 11, 2001, people came from every state in the nation to aide in the massive rescue and recovery effort at Ground Zero. FEMA deployed 20 Urban Search and Rescue task forces from 14 states, as far away as California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida to dig through the rubble, looking for survivors.

“These first responders – firefighters, police officers, emergency medical personnel, and others - did this amidst hundreds of tons of asbestos, nearly half a million pounds of lead, and untold amounts of glass fibers, steel and concrete that formed a massive cloud of toxic dust and smoke. Now, six years later, many of these selfless men and women are sick as a result of their work at Ground Zero. They are scattered across the country, many hundreds or thousands of miles away from the medical experts who are best qualified to treat them. Others who once lived in New York City have moved away, often because their illnesses were so severe.

“For six long years, we have fought every single day to force the federal government to provide health care for those people who have become sick from 9/11. And after six long years of shirking its responsibilities, it seemed like the Administration was finally poised to take the first step toward establishing a coordinated treatment mechanism for rescue and recovery workers who live outside the New York metropolitan area. The Department of Health and Human Services issued a Request for Proposals for the World Trade Center Business Process Center, which would manage this enormously complicated task.

“But now, the Administration is dropping the plan – because, it says, Congress has not provided enough money. If saving the lives of first responders requires more funds, the Administration should have asked Congress for more funds. It is outrageous to kill this program before its birth. The lives of the first responders should be worth more than the \$56 million the Administration says that it is short. The Bush Administration is yet again ignoring its moral obligation to the living victims of 9/11 – the White House is re-victimizing the victims of that tragedy.

“Furthermore, providing health care to sick first responders across the country is only one of several programs that must be put in place if we are to fully recover from the environmental effects of 9/11. We recently fought tooth and nail to provide funding for the Centers of Excellence, who are doing such an incredible job of caring for people with a myriad of 9/11-related diseases. I am proud to say that we secured \$108 million for 9/11 health, the first money to be provided in a regular appropriations bill. And for the first time, this federal funding will be available not only to first responders, but to everyone – residents, students, and area workers – whose health was affected by 9/11.

“But this is not enough. Last year, I introduced the 9/11 Health and Compensation Act with several of my colleagues, which would provide comprehensive health benefits to everyone whose health was affected by 9/11. And we still need a comprehensive test and clean plan to ensure that no one else will be harmed by contamination in their homes, schools, or offices.

“The World Trade Center Business Process Center is a crucial piece in providing health care to the thousands of people across the country whose health was affected by 9/11. As the Congressman who represents the area where the World Trade Center once stood, I saw first hand the incredible work they did in the wake of 9/11. We have a moral obligation to the living victims of 9/11, and I urge the Administration to honor its commitment and move forward with this program.”

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